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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LUSAKA 000492

SIPDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (CLASSIFIED BY LINE)

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [ZA](#)
SUBJECT: SURPRISING ZAMBIAN CABINET SHUFFLE

REF: A. LUSAKA 448
[1](#)B. LUSAKA 246
[1](#)C. 06 LUSAKA 1407

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CLASSIFIED BY: AMBASSADOR MARTINEZ REASON 1.4 B & D

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. President Mwanawasa announced several changes to Cabinet Minister appointments on April 23, only seven months into his second term of office. The greatest shock was the removal of Angela Cifire as Minister of Health. Cifire will be replaced by Brian Chituwo, who previously served as Health Minister and Education Minister in Mwanawasa's first term. Mwanawasa also announced that Deputy Foreign Minister Mike Mulongoti would fill the vacant Minister of Information and Broadcasting Services position held by Vernon ("V.J.") Mwaanga, who was sacked earlier in the month (Ref A). The President also swapped the portfolios of the Ministers of Commerce, Trade and Industry with Energy and Water, and named a new Minister of Science and Technology, and Minister of Gender and Women in Development. Although the naming of a new Information Minister was anticipated, the other changes surprised and mostly disappointed many observers in Zambia. The USG loses a hardworking partner in Cifire's sacking and an effective Foreign Ministry contact with Mulongoti's promotion; however, Chituwo is well and favorably known to us, and we expect the new Commerce, Trade and Industry Minister to be a strong collaborator on Millennium Challenge Account issues. End summary.

Announcement of Cabinet Changes: A Complete Surprise

[1](#)2. (U) In an unexpected announcement made on the evening of Monday, April 23, President Levy Mwanawasa dropped his charismatic Minister of Health Angela Cifire, replacing her with Dr. Brian Chituwo, who served most recently as Minister of Science and Technology, after having been both Education and Health Minister. The President named Deputy Foreign Minister Mike Mulongoti to succeed sacked Minister of Information and Broadcasting Services Vernon (V.J.) Mwaanga, noting the tremendous confidence he had in Mulongoti's ability and leadership qualities.

[1](#)3. (U) In a direct job swap, the President appointed Felix Mutati to be Minister of Commerce, Trade and Industry and Kenneth Konga to be Minister of Energy and Water. He named Minister of Communications and Transport Peter Daka to replace Chituwo as Minister of Science and Technology, Minister of Gender and Women in Development Sarah Sayifwanda to replace Daka, and promoted Deputy Minister of Youth, Sports and Child Development Patricia Mulasikwanda to replace Sayifwanda. The two Deputy Minister positions, at Foreign Affairs and at Youth, Sports and Child Development, were not

filled.

¶4. (SBU) Local papers carried quotations from letters of appointment that suggest areas for priority attention. For example, the President's letter to Brian Chituwo asked the new Health Minister to "ensure that abolition of user fees (for basic health services) did not result in the deterioration of the quality of health care currently being provided in the rural areas." The letter also directed Chituwo to make sure that medicines and other medical items were procured efficiently and transparently, to avoid shortages of critical drugs in health institutions, and to "ensure that an attractive reward package for core clinical staff, namely, doctors, nurses, pharmacists and laboratory technologists is put in place" to attract staff to work in rural areas. Comment: Many of the President's requests on health issues require extra resources that are not available. End comment.

¶5. (SBU) The President highlighted the importance of "internal trade" and citizen's economic empowerment to the new Minister of Commerce, Trade and Industry, Felix Mutati, who, prior to being Minister of Energy and Water, was Deputy Minister of Finance. He asked Kenneth Konga to devote attention to the Rural Electrification Program to improve access to electricity around the country, to address with urgency the need to make parastatal oil refinery Indeni operated more profitably and efficiently, and to expedite ongoing expansion programs for hydroelectric power generation. He also encouraged the new Minister of Communications and Transport Sarah Sayifwanda to conclude speedily the matter of establishing a national airline, to ensure that the private concession Railway Systems of Zambia performed "to expectations," and to finalize a Cabinet (decision) memorandum on the liberalization of the international voice gateway (IVG). Comment: Aside from the IVG liberalization, the other tasks mentioned by the President focus on the continuation or expansion of government control of the economy, with negative implications for private sector development. End comment.

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A Mystery--Why Drop Cifire?

¶6. (C) Mwanawasa announced his second term Cabinet lineup in October 2006 (Ref C), and seven months into the term seems early to be making so many changes, following two prior dismissals, with cause (Refs A, B). Cabinet Ministers told the Ambassador that they too were stunned by the President's announcement. Angela Cifire's dismissal in particular is surprising, puzzling and disappointing. The President offered no explanation for dropping her as Health Minister, but it is possible that he might comment further when he swears in the new Ministers. Cifire was highly regarded by the Diplomatic Corps. She has been a vocal critic of mismanagement in the Ministry and over time could have helped to effect needed reforms. On April 19, at Livingstone General Hospital, Cifire made widely-publicized comments chastising Health Ministry personnel over their abuse of grants, allowances and other emoluments. At an event with the Ambassador on April 20, Cifire echoed these concerns, and noted that she would not accept such payments herself. She also expressed frustration at the inability of the Ministry to provide basic maintenance on health facilities provided by donors. Such outspokenness could be one reason for her demise.

¶7. (C) Another possible scenario is that she confronted the Permanent Secretary of Health, Simon Miti, with concerns about inefficiencies, or worse, malfeasance. The Auditor General and Miti have recently battled very publicly over Miti's possible mismanagement of public resources and his refusal to cooperate with the Auditor General's office on a required annual audit. Miti serves as personal physician to the President, has strong connections to and influence with

the First Lady and State House, and has long been rumored (but never proved) to be involved in corrupt dealings with health funds. He would be the likely victor in any power struggle (although he reportedly had a stalemate with former Minister of Health Sylvia Masebo, who has her own strong base of political support at State House). Cifire had already caused Miti some embarrassment by opening major meetings (including several with donors) without him when he was tardy. Cifire's successor, Dr. Brian Chituwo, is well-regarded and has already proved himself a capable Health Minister. However, he is not politically strong, and will not be in a position to take on the Permanent Secretary.

A Big Opportunity--Mutati

18. (C) Felix Mutati is bright, articulate, and extremely competent. Although Mutati's departure from the Ministry of Energy and Water will likely result in less pressure on electricity parastatal ZESCO to improve its performance (under the amiable but ineffectual Kenneth Konga), his presence at Commerce, Trade and Industry means the USG has a stronger partner to engage with on implementation of the Millennium Challenge Account Threshold Program, particularly in dealing with the new Zambia Development Agency.

A Loss at Foreign Affairs--Mulongoti

19. (C) Mike Mulongoti is a knowledgeable and proactive interlocutor, and has been the Mission's principal high-level point of contact at the Foreign Ministry since his appointment last year. Foreign Minister Sikatana is mercurial and prone to incoherent rambling. Mulongoti's departure will leave a vacuum at the top levels of MFA, but he will be a useful "inner circle" contact in the Cabinet. He is a solid choice for the Information Minister position: he is not only a skilled speaker, but also a consummate politician with sterling MMD credentials.

MARTINEZ